

Special Talk

Dr. Benjamin Thomas Valentine

Dartmouth College, NH, USA

Telling New Stories with Old Bones: Understanding Harappan Migration through Archaeological Bone Chemistry

Isotopic analyses of human remains from Harappa, Farmana, and Sanauli suggest that a specific institution of migration helped integrate Harappan settlements with their resource-rich hinterlands. In fact, the diagnostic Mature Harappan cemetery form seen at Harappa's Cemetery R-37, Farmana, and a handful of other sites may have been dedicated primarily to a specific kind of first generation immigrant. This particular interpretation requires further testing through isotopic and archaeological work, but the striking patterns in the isotopic data clearly show that the migration of individuals contributed to the complex inter-regional networks of the Harappan Civilization. Even at Late Harappan Sanauli, where the isotopic data do not suggest a single common mode or reason for migration, it is clear that many Harappan individuals changed residence and moved long distances over their lifetimes. This research uses particular isotopic methods to suggest new interpretations of Harappan mobility, but a wide range of biogeochemical methods could be applied to existing South Asian archaeological collections. Isotopic analyses of skeletal material, metal and ceramic artifacts, and organic residues can provide many new insights into migration, trade, food production, and dietary practices. These independent lines of data complement conventional archaeological work and have been successfully and consistently applied to investigations of ancient human behavior around the world.

About the Speaker

Benjamin Valentine is at present a Robert A. and Catherine L. McKennan Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Anthropology, Dartmouth College. Benjamin has special interests in the application of stable isotope studies in Archaeology, and along with his Academic Advisor, Prof. John Krigbaum, University of Florida, has done extensive research with this technique in understanding human mobility in antiquity. His doctoral dissertation focused on the migration in the Indus Civilization based on the multi-site isotopic mortuary analysis. His studies include isotopic analysis of human remains from sites in South Asia, South East Asia, North America for understanding human mobility and migration in the past, subsistence strategies, climate change.

Venue: S5 105, IIT Gandhinagar, VGEC campus, Chandkheda, Ahmedabad

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